

MEMORANDUM

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May 19, 1972

JCS REVIEWED 05-Oct-2010: NO OBJECTION TO DECLASSIFICATION

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
FROM: HENRY A. KISSINGER
SUBJECT: General Abrams' Assessment

Attached at Tab A is a comprehensive report from General Abrams on the situation in South Vietnam. You are already familiar with much of the information and the summary section was incorporated in the report received earlier today from Ambassador Bunker. However, the following new points are of particular interest:

Military Region 1

-- ARVN command and control of forces in MR-1 has improved significantly with the arrival of Lt. General Truong.

-- A viable replacement system has been established and the personnel strength of the 1st ARVN Division is higher now than it has been at any time during this campaign.

-- Twenty crews have been trained on TOW anti-tank weapons and 6 anti-tank helicopters were moved to the Hue area on May 18.

Military Region 2

-- As in MR-1, new leadership has improved the situation in MR-2.

-- The newly assigned TOW systems and TacAir have been effective against recent tank attacks and have built ARVN confidence in their ability to cope with enemy armor.

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-- The situation around Kontum remains serious but the enemy is taking a heavy beating from the massive air power being devoted to the area.

-- The South Vietnamese have decided to fight the main battle of the central highlands in Kontum. Pleiku is only lightly held.

-- Because of damage inflicted by air strikes, improvement in leadership and correction of command and control deficiencies there is a reasonable chance that Kontum can be held.

Military Region 3

-- The enemy has suffered severe damage and is believed to have pulled most of his surviving forces away from An Loc and is keeping pressure there through fire power alone.

-- The crisis appears to be past in the province and air support around An Loc is being reduced and shifted to more critical areas.

Military Region 4

-- The action in MR-4 continues to be on a small scale with widely scattered ground attacks.

-- The main concern at the moment is the movement of elements of the 1st NVA Division out of Cambodia into MR-4.

-- Pacification has been set back in parts of MR-4 but there are presently no major crises.

Attachment

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May 19, 1972

FROM: General Abrams

SUBJECT: Special COMUSMACV Assessment

1. The purpose of this special assessment is to provide an overview of the situation in RVN as of May 20, 1972.

2. Military Region 1. The ARVN command and control of forces in MR-1 has improved significantly, highlighted by the arrival and subsequent actions taken by LTG Truong. Completion and distribution of a plan for the effective defense of Hue, the deployment of forces in depth, the conduct of limited offensive operations and the personal pressures of Truong have considerably improved the confidence and morale of civilians and military alike. The I DASC has moved to Hue along with the I Corps headquarters and all operations are being directed from that critical area. Command lines and areas of responsibility have been clearly defined for the Marine, 1st Division and 2nd Airborne Brigade, placing all combat units in each of these areas under the respective commanders. On May 13 in coordination with the ARG, ARVN marine elements air assaulted into the Hai Lang area in a successful initiative. On May 14, 1st Division elements southeast of Hue initiated limited offensive operations in the Birmingham-Bastogne-King area. Also successfully still another initiative was executed on May 7 with airmobile assaults seizing the critical high ground west of Hue. On May 15, the 1st Division air assaulted a small force onto Bastogne and were joined by two platoons moving overland. A viable replacement system has been established, and the personnel strength of the 1st ARVN Division is higher now than it has been at any time during this campaign. The 2nd Airborne Brigade deployment to Hue, which will be followed by the remainder of the airborne division as it becomes available, will give Truong a definite offensive capability and objectives for such operations are being formulated. Twenty Marine and 1st ARVN Division crews have been trained and are now operational on TOW antitank weapons, and six SS-11 antitank helicopters moved to Hue/Phu Bai on May 18. 7th Air Force had conducted a highly effective air campaign in northern MR-1 and route pack 1, cutting and keeping cut the LOC's, hitting troop and logistics areas, and at the same time suppressing or destroying the SAM system both below and immediately above the DMZ. Naval gunfire has worked the coastal areas constantly and is also reported by the field commanders to be highly effective.

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3. Military Region 2. As in MR-1, new leadership has improved the situation. Command relationships have been improved by consolidating the 23d Division in Kontum and placing all forces under command of the commander, 23d Division. The newly assigned TOW systems and TacAir have been effective against recent tank attacks and have built ARVN confidence in their ability to cope with enemy armor which precipitated the earlier rout at Tanh Canh. There are 12 maneuver battalions in Kontum. The situation around Kontum remains serious, but the enemy is taking a heavy beating from the massive air power that is being devoted to that area. A ground attack to open the road is planned for May 21 and will be strongly supported by US air assets. The Kontum airfield is effectively targeted, inhibiting daylight airlanded resupply beginning May 17; however, resupply during the night is being continued. Sapper attacks continue to be the main threat at both Cam Ranh Bay and Pleiku. The RVNAF has made the decision to fight the main battle of the central highlands at Kontum. Pleiku is only lightly held by about five effective maneuver battalions plus RF units. The 22d Division headquarters has moved to Binh Dinh Province, and the Division Commander will assume command of all forces there. Three of the Division's four regiments are now in the province, although at the moment, only one is considered effective. The northern portion of Binh Dinh above the Bong Son Pass remains in enemy hands. Route 19 is open though vulnerable. The ROK contribution to the main battle continues to be minimal. Because of damage inflicted on the enemy by air strikes, improvement in leadership, and correction of command and control deficiencies, I believe there is a reasonable chance that Kontum can be held.

4. Military Region 3. The situation around An Loc has been held together with firepower plus a stubborn defense by the soldiers defending from inside the city and greatly assisted by US advisors with them. The defense has been kept alive with air drop resupply. The actions by CG, III Corps to open Route 13 to An Loc and destroy enemy forces surrounding the city have lacked aggressiveness and disciplined leadership. The enemy has suffered severe damage, is believed to have pulled most of his surviving force away from the city, and is keeping pressure on An Loc through firepower alone. Clearing up the situation is within the III Corps capability and should be accomplished within a matter of days. The city itself is presently within light artillery range of the relief column. I believe that the crisis is past in Binh Long Province. I am reducing the air support

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around An Loc and shifting the effort to other more critical areas. There continue to be small contacts along the Saigon River corridor and in Phuoc Tuy Province where security has been significantly degraded. The friendly forces in Phuoc Tuy are adequate for the situation but there are serious leadership problems which GVN efforts should soon correct.

5. Military Region 4. The action in MR-4 continues to be small scale, widely scattered ground attacks and attacks by fire against territorial force outposts, national police, and lines of communication; the only broad pattern appears to be the enemy's attempt to establish a strong position in western Chuong Thien Province with a supply corridor coming out of the U Minh forrest, and a strong position in Base Area 470 with a supply corridor from Cambodia along the Kien Thuong-Kien Phong Province bounardy. General Nghi, who replaced General Truong as IV Corps commander, is doing a good job. He has made his presence felt, issued clear instructions to his subordinates, and has had some success in getting ARVN forces out looking for the enemy. A series of B-52 strikes with ground followup have been effective in damaging the enemy and the B-52's plus US TacAir have bolstered morale. The main concern at the moment is the movement of 1st NVA Division elements out of Cambodia into MR-4. One battalion is now believed to be in MR-4. Pacification has been set back in parts of MR-4, but there are presently no major crises.

6. This is the way the overall situation looks to me at this time. The enemy holds the Province of Quang Tri, northern and western Kontum except for Kontum City and a few small bases, northwestern Pleiku, the north half of Binh Dinh and northern Binh Long. He has suffered very heavy personnel and materiel losses, especially tanks. His artillery losses have also been heavy; however, it continues to function effectively. He is having difficulty moving his supplies and replacements due to air interdiction and muddy road conditions in the Laotian Panhandle. In northern MR-1 he is shifting his logistics system eastward. His anti-aircraft system continues to be formidable but greatly degraded in comparison with that of late March and April. He has had only minimal assistance from local force units and guerrillas as evidenced by the fact that since March 30 there has been significant enemy activity in only 16 of the 44 provinces. Friendly forces in MR-1 are in the best defensive posture around Hue that they have had at the outset of any of their battles thus far and they are conducting limited offensive operations. With continued air support, friendly forces have a good chance of holding Hue

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and inflicting a major defeat on the enemy. In MR-2, preparations for the defense of Kontum are sound and, although the fighting record of MR-2 forces has been poor and resupply will be a problem, I believe that they have a reasonable chance of holding Kontum with continued massive air support. The enemy launched a heavy assault on Kontum City early on May 19. It was beaten off by the defenders. In MR-3, the critical point should be behind us. In MR-4, we can expect some hard fighting particularly against the 1st NVA Division but this should not be of decisive proportions. I believe that we are approaching a condition in which the B-52 effort and additional TacAir should and will be shifted away from the close in life or death targets to the enemy logistics system in country, in the border area of Laos and in Route Pack 1. The An Loc situation in the past few days has improved to the extent that we are already beginning to reduce the air effort there. We still must get the close-in enemy off our backs in the Kontum and Hue areas. We are now completing our targetting against this logistics system and will shift more of the air effort to it as quickly as the Kontum and Hue situations permit. It is now a matter of timing as to when we can hurt him most by shifting greater effort to the logistics that he will need to resupply and re-equip his units for the final Kontum-Hue efforts. We are watching this carefully. I am convinced that we have hurt the enemy far more severely than the statistical evidence indicates. We have the weaponry, fire support and forces it takes to win and there has been noticeable improvement in fighting spirit in MR-1 and to a degree in MR-2. We are approaching a turning point in this battle and we must now encourage and convince the RVNAF that the time is near when they must move forward.

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